

before the session ends, while there is little prospect of the adoption of the Fassett scheme for a commission to frame a general law for the government of cities. If the Consolidation Commission succeeds in devising a charter which would secure an effective government for the great city of the future, it will do much not only to promote the object of consolidation, but to show the way for legislation for the government of cities generally. Its work may well be taken as the preliminary effort at the solution of the greatest problem of the time. In fact, if it succeeds, it will perform a task hardly less difficult or less important than that of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and one which will only be second to that in its benefits to mankind. Self-government in all that relates to local affairs by the people of one great city is the problem for statesmanship to solve.

METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT.

The recommendation by the Fassett committee of a general law for the government of cities suggests the difference in the conditions and requirements of a great municipality like New-York and those of the smaller cities of the State. Should the plan of consolidating the metropolis be adopted, as it will be sooner or later, there will be upon New-York Bay and the connecting waters a great commercial and industrial community containing approximately one-half the population and much more than one-half the wealth of the State. It will contain within a comparatively short time a population greater than that of the thirteen colonies when they declared their independence of Great Britain and established themselves as a nation, while in point of variety of industries and employments and material wealth, in everything but land, it will far exceed the infant republic of a century ago.

It may safely be said that the problem of governing this metropolis of the near future is a more difficult one than that of governing the Nation in 1789, and in some respects more difficult than that of governing the Nation to-day. Apart from international relations and the conflict of interests produced by an effort to unite a number of independent colonies into a single but complex nationality, the framers of the Federal Constitution had a simpler task than that of making a charter for the metropolis that is to occupy the Atlantic gateway of the continent. Here is to be congregated within an area less than twenty-five miles square a population of three millions, which will multiply indefinitely within those limits probably until it exceeds that of any city in the world. That population will be made up of pretty much all the elements of human kind, in various stages of intellectual and moral development, and the occupations and interests in which they will be engaged will be vast and varied. Moreover, the relation of municipal government to its subjects is much more direct and intimate than that of State or national government, and its powers are constantly exercised and constantly felt for good or bad by the concentrated population upon which it operates. Public safety, health, and comfort will depend for millions of people absolutely upon the municipal administration, and if it fails they will be helpless, for individual and private action in such a community will be ineffective for protection.

It is doubtful if any general law can be devised for the proper government of all the cities of the State, including those which are newly organized with a few thousand people and the metropolitan city that will in due time include New-York and Brooklyn. If there should be a grading according to population for purposes of adapting the framework of government to different requirements, the metropolis would have to stand as a class by itself, and it would be simpler to give it a separate charter and have the general law apply only to smaller cities. It is not likely that a general law, with provision for grading cities by population, would afford protection from charter-tinkering by the Legislature. Changes could be made by amendment affecting only cities of a certain class, and under a practice that has been common as a means of evading the prohibition of special legislation they could be applied to all the cities in the State having more than 2,000,000 inhabitants, or all having, according to the last census, between 100,000 and 125,000 inhabitants, as the case might be, and so be made to affect any particular municipality.

The metropolitan charter of the future ought to be in the nature of a constitution and frame of government for the metropolis alone, adapted to the conditions and requirements of its people. The bill authorizing the Consolidation Commission to frame a charter with reference to the city which it proposes to consolidate has been passed by the Senate at Albany, and it probably will be passed by the Assembly